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This American Is Lawrence of Arabia in 1964

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Wearing the turban, the flowing cloak, and the jeweled curved dagger of a desert sheik, a 45-year-old "white Moslem" from California has cast himself in the role of an American Lawrence of Southwest Arabia.

He is an ex-U. S. Army paratroop major who is now a colonel in the army of his boyhood "pen pal," King Al Badr of Yemen, seeking to drive the Egyptians out of the land of the Queen of Sheba and re-establish complete control of the country.

Col. Abdurrahman may be no Peter O'Toole when it comes to looks, but he has lived as a native with the Arabs perhaps longer now than Lawrence ever did and has probably seen as much action—both against the British in the Aden Protectorate and against the republican-Egyptian forces which now control half of Yemen.

Few men have ever gone native more completely than the Moslem convert from San Jose, Calif., who was born plain Bruce Conde and who first came to Yemen some seven years ago, not to fight, but to try to corner the valuable Yemeni stamp market.

Even his critics grudgingly admit that he is probably the world's greatest expert on the customs, mores, lore

and legends of the tribes of Southwest Arabia who—by foregoing intermarriage—are ethnically the same today as they were when Sheba went to court King Solomon.

Today he is fighting in the unbelievably wild mountain desert of North-western Yemen with the royalist forces which retreated to their virtually impregnable redoubt when his friend, the Imam, was overthrown last year by Gen. Salal's republicans. Salal later brought Egyptian planes and tanks to help them hold power.

Impartial observers maintain that the royalist tribes still loyal to the Imam hold anything from a third to one-half of the country, and practically all the highlands.

Arab experts are either the most visionary, like Lawrence, or the most realistic, like the oil men, in the world. And Conde is something of a fantasist.

Lawrence once warned in his classic book, "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom," to beware of the man who dreams by day because the daydreamer will have the courage to carry out his dreams.



Col. Abdurrahman

GENEALOGICAL GIMMICK

And Col. Abdurrahman, nee Bruce Conde, has dreamed up one of the most ingenious genealogical gimmicks ever to climb a family tree: he claims twin descent both from the Kings of Spain and from the Prophet Mohammed. His deduction makes for fascinating logic.

First, he discovered that the Conde family was a branch of the Bourbon dynasty. After what he claims was considerable genealogical research, he changed his name to Bourbon-Conde.

When he told me the first episode of that name-change, he was not at all amused when I joked and said: "I would have changed it, not to Bourbon-Conde but to Conde-Nast, Bruce. Better to be related to live magazines than a dead dynasty."

As fantastic as it seems, he even convinced the late Imam Ahmed, father of Al Badr, that the Bourbon-Conde family, through the Moorish influence, were part-Moslem and that he, Conde, and the Imam were, in fact, cousins. The Imam swallowed it with the eagerness with which he chewed qat, the local herbaceous drug, and called Conde "cousin."

The next step in the evolution of Bruce Conde was his contention—again he claimed it was based on scholarly research—that on his Moorish side he was also descended from the Prophet.

Conde had been dreaming the Arabian nights since boyhood when he first became a pen-pal of King Al Badr. An avid stamp collector, Conde in his teens wrote a blind letter to the Yemen government to try to buy some of the rare and fairly valuable Yemeni stamps direct from the source.

To his surprise, he received a letter from Prince Al Badr, then also in his teens. They worked a deal trading stamps. Conde as a schoolboy got something of a corner on the market in the states, he claims. That began a long pen-pal correspondence which continued until Conde finally came to Yemen.

Most men would dream of vast oil concessions in return for their loyalty. But not Conde. His obsession still is world-wide control, and exclusive concession, for Yemeni stamps. He seems oblivious to the fact that their value has sharply deteriorated since only a few years ago when Yemen was still a land more remote from the foreigner than even Tibet.

But Conde is a man with a resolutely, unshakable one-track mind. He claims he fought as an intelligence major with the 82d Airborne Division in North Africa and Italy. After the war, he says, he was stationed in Japan as an intelligence officer. He was a great admirer of Gen. MacArthur "as a man who understands other races." A couple of years ago when a sheik gave him a thoroughbred Arab pony, he named it Ibn MacArthur.

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